

From: March, Joseph H.
To: Public Relations Division
Sent: 5/11/2010 1:21:09 PM
Subject: Press Release: Desecration of Mojave Desert Cross Does Not Deter The American Legion in its Fight to Protect Memorials

Attachments:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Desecration of Mojave Desert Cross Does Not Deter The American Legion in its Fight to Protect Memorials

INDIANAPOLIS (May 11, 2010) - The American Legion vowed to continue its fight to preserve a veterans' war memorial in the Mojave desert, even after vandals have apparently removed the cross in the middle of the night.

"This was never about one cross," said The American Legion National Commander Clarence E. Hill. "It's about the right to honor our nation's veterans in a manner in which the overwhelming majority supports. The American Legion strongly believes the public has a right to protect its memorials."

The lawless act is just the latest chapter in a decade-long legal fight pitting The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Liberty Institute and several other organizations against the American Civil Liberties Union and other groups that find the cross offensive.

According to a statement issued by the Mojave National Preserve, the cross was reported missing on Monday morning by staff of the National Park Service who went to the site to replace the wooden cover that had been removed from the cross sometime earlier. The cross has stood for the last 76 years as a memorial to World War I soldiers. The American Legion and its allies won what was widely believed to be a Supreme Court victory on April 28, when the court ruled that the memorial was not an overtly religious symbol. Moreover, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote that "the Constitution does not oblige government to avoid any public acknowledgment of religion's role in society." The Supreme Court ordered a lower court to reconsider the case.

The desecration of the memorial, did not sit well with Hill. "Reports that the Mojave Cross was illegally removed overnight are very disturbing," he said. "The American Legion expects whoever is responsible for this vile act to be brought to justice. While the memorial has been attacked, the fight will continue to ensure that veterans memorials will remain sacrosanct."

"This is an outrage, akin to desecrating people's graves," said Kelly Shackelford, president / CEO of Liberty Institute. "It's a disgraceful act on the selfless act of our veterans. We will not rest until this memorial is re-installed."

A \$25,000 reward is being offered for information leading to the arrest of those responsible. Anyone with information about the crime is asked to call (760) 252-6120.

With a membership of 2.5-million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and patriotic youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through more than 14,000 posts across the nation.

-30-

Media contacts: Joe March or John Raughter, (317) 630-1253, or cell (317) 748-1926 / (317) 441-8847.